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The Children of China

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A CHINESE GIRL, YOCHOW, CHINA

China has been an unchanged and unchanging land for thousands of years, domestic and educational customs have remained the same from generation to generation, so that children of this Oriental nation are being brought up and

taught now just in the same way as their ancestors of long ago. They are no doubt as entirely different from the children of America as any that can be found anywhere in the world. Yet the missionaries, who try to teach them about Jesus Christ find that His gospel is successfully made clear to the souls of the young Orientals, who seem so odd to us on first acquaintance.

The Chinese are a very hearty people, and their birth-rate is probably not exceeded in any land. Babies do not receive the proper sanitary care, and it is only because they belong to such a strong race that many of the children grow up. A large percentage do die at an early age; and it is hard to say what they may not suffer.

Among the masses of the people such unhealthy and uncleanly habits prevail that one could scarcely believe such things possible if they had not heard of them from an eye witness. An infant is wrapped in pieces of old garments of the mother's, and custom dictates that it is a mistake to give the child a bath until it is at least a year old. These little bundles of humanity inclosed in dirty rags spend their days strapped upon their mother's back while she pursues her tasks—often at hard work in the field, where the child's eyes are exposed to the wind, the sun and the dust.

How the little girls used to suffer

when the custom of foot-binding prevailed! When they could not sleep for the pains, and would cry out in the night, their mothers would beat them with a stick, kept for this very purpose. Sometimes opium was used to quiet them. But Christian influence has at last to a great extent overcome this cruel, horrible practice of foot-binding.

Chinese women are skillful in embroidery and make many gay garments and fancy caps for their infants and children. It is the custom to present little babies, especially boys, with curiously designed and elaborately embroidered silk caps. These are not only intended to protect the head and be an ornament, but also to ward off evil influences. For this reason they often have a tiger on them and the tiger is supposed to see the evil spirit coming near the child and scare it off. Sometimes they embroider butterflies, sometimes flowers, and sometimes bats; for they think the bat brings good luck.

The wealthy Chinese children are dressed in handsome silks, just such as their parents wear. But children of the peasants and the working classes everywhere wear garments made out of a strong blue cotton cloth. For winter these garments are wadded thickly, and as the weather becomes colder another and still another garment is put on. In midwinter they look as if they had been

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stuffed into their clothing, and sometimes move with difficulty on account of the burdensomeness of it. In summer they wear very few and thin garments. Owing to their numerous garments and unclean habits, as well as unwholesome food, the poor little Chinese children are the victims of many distressing and contagious diseases of the head and skin.

There is nothing in a Chinese home to furnish a happy or comfortable environment for the children. There is no meal table at which the family gather,

and children seldom eat with their parents, at least with their father. They sit around anywhere stuffing down the contents of the rice bowl and the meat bowl. Their diet consists of rice three or four times a day; and fowl, fish or pork, generally pork, once a day. The fathers sometimes do love their sons—they pay little attention to the girls—but they consider it beneath their dignity to sympathize with the boys or to show any interest in their games. The children in some rural localities seem to exist without any sports or games, but in towns and cities various odd small toys are exhibited in the shops—most brilliantly ornamented with paint. Children also engage in lively sports in these places.

Boys and girls who run about on the streets, use most disgusting and vulgar language, and quarrel a great deal. They grow up with impure thoughts filling their minds. The Buddhist priests tell these children dreadful tales of punishment in hell; of knives and tongs and other instruments of torture, of dogs and serpents, and cauldrons of boiling oil. Think how much they need to hear of the Saviour and Friend of children! Every dollar that we send them can do something; every prayer can do something more.

Missionaries and students are writing about a "New China;" every one in our Christian land, no matter how young,

who gives and prays for the cause, can have a part in the making of "New China." One of the greatest forces that shall bring about this great change is the school. The Chinese have methods in their schools that seem most peculiar to us. It is their idea that only those in high position need much education, and their text-books are the precepts of the philosophers who lived more than a thousand years ago. It was a strange sight to see a little girl, whose chin just reached up to the table where she stood, reciting from the book of Confucius, who was born about five hundred years before Christ, and apparently did not think much of little girls. In school the children read and study aloud, and it seems they try to rival each other in making a noise. The Chinese never talk of the intellect being located in the head, but rather in the bowels, and they yell out so that the bowels will hear what they are studying. They have remarkable memories, but not great reasoning powers. They use characters that signify different objects and things instead of an alphabet, and their language has no grammar. They do not read from left to right as we do, but up and down. When writing their names they always put first the character that stands for the surname. The family name is considered of much more importance than the individual. Filial piety and respect and

worship of ancestors are implanted early in the minds of the young. They must reverence their parents and take care not to offend the spirits of their departed ancestors. They are also taught to offer incense to various gods, small and great.

On the houseboat, which carried us three hundred and fifty miles in sixteen days, lived the owner, his wife and two small children and aged mother. The grandmother seemed devoted to the elder child—a boy of about four years. He was a cute little chap, but most serious and never was heard laughing. None of the boat crew seemed very particular about offering incense to the river gods, although they offered the same head and tail of a pig day after day. But the aged grandmother daily provided the little boy with about a dozen sticks of incense which she lighted for him, and the little fellow would march out gravely and place them between the boards of the deck. Then he stood watching until they all burnt out. All the while he looked as serious as an old priest.

Is there any child in America who has no playthings? This little boy on the houseboat had none—finally one day he secured from the cook two cans that had contained vegetables and had bright pictures on them. These he carried up and down day after day as treasures no doubt. But can it be imagined that he

did not beat those cans? Strange as it may seem he enjoyed them in silence. The joys of the lands of Christmastide and Children's Day are utterly wanting in the lives of the children in China, but the message of the Christ of the children is being carried to them by a large number of earnest workers.

Chinese boys and girls do not know enough to inquire about our religion or desire it; but they do desire our Western learning, and with it they receive the Gospel message. The children in the Christian schools look so different, with their clean faces, neat hair and smiles. It is surprising how soon the stupid, stolid look is exchanged for a bright smile, under Christian influence. A cake of soap and a handkerchief can work wonders, while the hymns and songs they learn wield a miraculous power in transforming their expressions.

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